

**Chatham County Board of Health
Meeting Minutes
Monday, August 22, 2022
Dunlap Building – 80 East Street, Pittsboro, NC 27312
Chatham County Agriculture and Conference Center – 1192 US Highway 64 BUS, Pittsboro, NC
27312**

The Chatham County Board of Health held its monthly meeting on Monday August 22, 2022. The meeting begun in the Board Room of the Dunlap Building in Pittsboro, North Carolina. As noted below, after a brief recess, the meeting restarted at the Chatham County Agriculture and Conference Center in Pittsboro, North Carolina.

Attendees

Board Members: Karen Barbee, EdD, Chair; Stephanie Freese, DVM, Vice Chair; Franklin Gomez Flores, Commissioner; Alan Rimer, PE, PhD; Tammy Lloyd, MD; William Roscoe, OD; Ashley Pappas, PharmD, MHA; Marcia E. Herman-Giddens, PA, MPH, Dr PH; Carol Reitz-Barlow, MSN, RN CCRN; Judith Malone, RN; Zachary Brian, DMD, MHA

Staff: Michael Zelek, Zachary Horner, Brandy Prieto, Alicia Reynolds, Danielle White, Samantha Owusu, Alicia Doran, Julie Goodwin, Zach Deaton, Anne Lowry, Brenda Clegg

Others: Rob Schooley, Tracy Fowler – Chatham County Schools; Dr. Jeff Strickler, Dr. Eric Wolak – Chatham Hospital

Welcome and Call to Order

Dr. Barbee called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. She asked for a motion to recess to allow the meeting to move to the Chatham County Agriculture and Conference Center.

Dr. Herman-Giddens made the motion, Dr. Freese seconded. The motion was approved unanimously. The meeting recessed at 6:01 p.m.

Dr. Barbee brought the meeting out of recess at 6:30 p.m. at the Chatham County Agriculture and Conference Center in Pittsboro.

Conflict of Interest

Ms. Reitz-Barlow reported that she works for UNC Health. Commissioner Gomez Flores reported that he is on the board of Chatham Hospital.

Approve Agenda

Dr. Rimer made a motion to approve the agenda as presented, Dr. Herman-Giddens seconded. The motion was approved unanimously.

Consent Agenda

Dr. Freese made a motion to approve the consent agenda as presented, Dr. Rimer seconded. The motion was approved unanimously.

Public Input Session

Dr. Barbee opened the public input session and said that the comments will be limited to two minutes per speaker.

Kimberly Sniffen: She reported that she just finished delivering a baby at Chatham Hospital. She said she is one of the midwives at Chatham Hospital. She said she spoke in protest of the impending closure of the Maternity Care Center (MCC) at Chatham Hospital. She said the reintroduction of the MCC was a multi-faceted, multi-organization effort.

Dr. Fareedot Oluyadi: She said she was a provider at the MCC. She said the MCC's closure will negatively impact Chatham County and will continue a trend of these types of services closing in needy counties across the state. She said she feels unseen and silenced within the system.

Charlotte Zuber Paton: She said she is the lactation consultant at the MCC. She said that there were 120 births and "countless patients triaged" from November 2021 to June 2022, when the center was open only 5 days a week, and 14 births in July 2022. She said much of the crisis is centered around lack of staffing in nurses, which she said is a symptom of an underlying root cause.

Dr. Michaela McCuddy: She said she provides prenatal services at Piedmont Health Services. She said the impending closure of the unit is a hazardous event and would fail the community. She said the workers of the Chatham MCC request an analysis of why this would be closed and community action to support the MCC to keep it open. She said the staff is asking for a moratorium on the decision to allow for work to see what would help.

Ellen Chetwynd: She said she was here as a member of the maternity care center evaluation team. She said the team has been looking at the center from multiple angles. She said it was very hard to keep nurses at any rural maternity center, and that there are many solutions from North Carolina, the United States, and Canada. She added that the community has changed with the addition of the MCC, including more care providers for pregnant mothers. She added that 11.2% of the population that delivered at the MCC in its first year of existence was white, while 82% of the county's population is white.

Jen Costello: She said she was at the meeting representing EMBRACe, Equity for Moms and Babies Realized across Chatham. She said the group is about serving birthing people in the community through action. She said data showed that there needs to be a coordinated care system for moms and babies to decrease inequities in birth outcomes. She said losing the MCC would mean several programs ceasing to exist. She said they understand that the hospital has challenges, but the answers are not in the hallways of one agency.

Stephanie Terry: She said she is the organizing director for Chatham Organizing for Racial Equity. She said access to maternity care is a reproductive health right and a community health issue, and the MCC serves as critical infrastructure. She said they understand that there is a concern related to staffing constraints, but a solution can be found with consultation and that the Chatham community and the hospital leadership hold the capacity and creativity necessary to solve the problem. She said CORE is calling on Chatham Hospital to put the lives and well-being of moms and babies first by committing to a moratorium on a decision to close the MCC.

Kristen Coleman: She said she comes on behalf of the community where she has lived her entire life. She said she was on staff at the hospital and birthed her baby at the hospital. She said she has only heard positive things from every mother who had a baby she spoken to. She said it is hard to find nurses that work labor and delivery and do it all.

Dr. Patrick C. Smith: He said he is a family medicine physician who moved here this week to work. He said he was moving from southeast Colorado where he worked at a critical access hospital. He said he knows what it is like and has seen the repercussions, and he said it is awful. He said he was the lone permanent doctor in that area that was delivering babies and said it was a nightmare. He said people will die if services discontinue.

Maternity Care Center Update

Dr. Jeff Strickler, President of Chatham Hospital, and Dr. Eric Wolak, Chief Nursing Operator and Chief Operating Officer of Chatham Hospital, gave an update on the Maternity Care Center at Chatham Hospital.

Dr. Strickler spoke first. He said no decision has been made yet about the program. He said the challenge is real. He added the hospital has been unable to sustain nursing staff for 24/7 coverage, something the hospital has been trying to navigate throughout the pandemic. Dr. Strickler said the program was just coming online in the early stages of the pandemic. He noted there were 90-plus deliveries in the first year and more than 120 deliveries in the second year. He said that Chatham Hospital weathered the first half of the pandemic fairly well and was impacted by COVID-19 more than many rural hospitals in North Carolina, with more than half of their beds filled with COVID-positive patients at the peak.

Eventually, Dr. Strickler said, the Great Resignation hit, and many people in healthcare were moving out of their roles. He added that many units went to one-half or one-third of staffing and the hospital handled it well enough, but the Delta and Omicron waves hit the workforce hard again. Dr. Strickler said that all hospitals are facing this, noting there are behavioral health patients who are waiting for days for care, and that there are high-risk patients who are waiting for transfer. He added that at many times, 8 of 10 emergency department beds are filled with behavioral health patients and people needing a transfer.

Dr. Strickler referred to a slide. He said there was a steady increase in births in the early months of the opening with a baseline of around 12 deliveries per month. He said the hospital lost around 50% of its staff by November 2021, adding that many of the deliveries are scheduled

inductions, so it was a way to keep the program moving forward. It led to a substantial decrease in deliveries. He said the team was rebuilt to re-start 24/7 operations in July, then there were three additional resignations. The center was changed to go back to five-days-a-week operations. He offered a projection for births from August to December 2022.

Dr. Strickler mentioned that the hospital does not have the staff to remain 24/7 and has not made any decisions regarding the long-term future of the center. He said nurse staffing is the main challenge, something he said was not on the center's radar. He said that the staff is at 35% vacancy, but that includes some travelers who work within the UNC hospital system. Without them, the vacancy is more than 40%. He said people left for multiple reasons, including taking travel assignments, getting other nursing jobs, and the hospital having a low number of deliveries.

Dr. Strickler shared that everyone in healthcare has been trying to respond to the Great Resignation. He said UNC Health has made substantial investments in hospital staff, including increasing total staff salary by more than \$1 million. He said Chatham Hospital has been pretty successful in trying to recruit in many areas. For example, he said, the Emergency Department is now down to 1% staffing vacancy but was around 50%.

Dr. Strickler said the hospital's goal is to provide the highest quality and safe care to mothers. He said the hospital is 1 resignation away from not being able to safely maintain the program. He added that it is important to work with community stakeholders like CCPHD, Piedmont, EMBRACe, and others, noting that the hospital is going to put together a community task force to work over the next 60 days to make recommendations for the program. He said the task force will be made up of stakeholders, with 17 members, with two people chairing it. He said their output will be to make recommendations to hospital leadership.

Dr. Wolak said that he appreciates the community comments and added that there is no imminent plan to close the MCC. He said the resignations in July led to reducing the operations to protect the safety of mothers. He said positions are posted and there are hiring events. Once the hospital was able to hire enough staff to have two nurses per shift, the center would go back to 24/7.

In July, Dr. Wolak said, three staff left: one nurse left to go to the post-partum center, another left, and another nurse was going to join but took a different offer. He said the hospital was hoping to over-hire, but those resignations had a dramatic impact. He added salary is the same that the UNC Medical Center and REX pays and is in the same market as Alamance and Duke. He shared that there is a sign-on bonus. Dr. Roscoe said that the hospital may need to pay more to recruit to Siler City. Dr. Wolak said many staff live in Pittsboro and Asheboro, and they use the fact that they are a critical access hospital as part of recruiting. Dr. Strickler added that retention is more of an issue than recruiting.

The discussion was opened up to questions and comments from Board of Health members.

Dr. Freese said veterinarians have similar staffing issues but have been working on a more flexible schedule. Dr. Strickler said there has been discussions of that. He said the hospital has been trying to schedule deliveries within those five days, but the goal is to have 24/7 care. Dr. Freese asked about on-call operations and possibly more flexible days. Dr. Wolak said there is an issue related to nurse pay for on-call, and that having more flexible days can be confusing.

Dr. Strickler said it can be difficult to pull people from the emergency department, and that a nurse cannot work in multiple departments but gets trained for specific competencies. Dr. Wolak said that the Emergency Department has about 50 visits a day, and that ED staff needs to be available to care for patients in that moment.

Dr. Herman-Giddens asked if there was any analysis related to prospective patients related to low numbers of births. Dr. Strickler said that roughly 700 births come out of Chatham County, with most coming from the eastern side of Chatham. When the MCC opened, he said, the hospital undertook numerous marketing efforts that leaned more heavily to the digital side. He said what that has accomplished the most is hospital awareness. He said that mothers go to where their physicians and prenatal care providers tell them to go. He said that the hospital is not getting people who would choose to go there because that is not where their physician is operating from, which was a lesson learned.

Dr. Pappas asked about the hospital's connection to the UNC Health system. Dr. Strickler said that some nurses from other facilities have come to Chatham to help. Dr. Wolak said there are significant shortages across healthcare. Dr. Strickler added that the travel distance is a dissatisfier for staff.

Dr. Rimer said that exit interviews do not always tell the truth. He asked if there was a systemic issue with management that staff are not willing to talk about. Additionally, he asked if there were other hospital systems that had similar challenges. Dr. Wolak said that there is another rural hospital (not a critical access center) that closed their maternity care center due to lack of nurses.

Dr. Lloyd asked why the hospital pushed so hard to open the center and what has changed. Dr. Strickler said the entire project was not as much about deliveries in Chatham County but trying to come up with an alternate model that was sustainable for rural maternity care as part of an evaluation. He said the second piece was training rural physicians in rural communities so that they would stay in rural communities. Specific to Chatham, he said, was access to care for people who really did not have that access. He said those goals continue. Dr. Strickler said the hospital wants to continue but the sustainability piece has been difficult. He said right now the hospital is trying to have the staff for the program, or else it would answer the sustainability question. Dr. Wolak said he is working very hard every day to keep the MCC open, to extend hours.

Dr. Freese asked if the hospital has considered asking local staff what is making them stay. Dr. Wolak said the hospital has done that. Dr. Strickler said the community task force will tackle that as well.

Dr. Brian said an ambassador program with current employees might help. He said that has worked well in Pennsylvania. He said a critical piece is addressing the workforce relating to it reflecting the population it serves.

Dr. Pappas asked how the current turnover rate compared to pre-pandemic. Dr. Wolak said he did not have the numbers with him. He added that the MCC had to change its operations almost a year ago to Monday to Thursday, but is now Monday to Friday. Dr. Strickler said what has changed is the pandemic and the Great Resignation. Dr. Pappas added that there may be more patients with the growth coming to Chatham. Dr. Strickler added that the access that is needed is pre-natal care, particularly as the county grows. Dr. Strickler said that system funding has been granted for a larger medical office building in Chatham Park, and a family medicine primary care provider will be coming to Chatham as well from UNC.

Dr. Herman-Giddens said that many patients at the hospital are relying on Medicaid. She said that many potential new patients with the growth may be private pay patients. Dr. Strickler said marketing plays a role, but a mother's primary care provider usually directs mothers into a program.

Dr. Barbee said the board of health wants to be more involved in where this is headed. She asked if a board of health member can serve on this community task force. Dr. Strickler said it is a possibility but he will have to check on the group charter. He said they wanted to keep the task force small enough to be manageable in getting the work done.

Michael Zelek, Public Health Director, said the community task force is charged with digging deeper into a lot of the questions. He asked if there is a way to ensure the group has enough time to do their work before long-term decisions are made. Dr. Strickler said this is the type of conversation that can linger on, so the 60-day time limit was set to get recommendations. He said the hospital is focused on hiring staff and getting back to 24/7 operations. Mr. Zelek said the Public Health Department recognizes the value and the role of the MCC. He said this is a really important service and a part of the healthcare landscape for moms and babies.

REPORTS

Annual School Health Position Report

Rob Schooley, Chatham County Schools, provided the report for the Student Health, Physical Education, and Wellness Instructional Program Facilitator.

Mr. Schooley said there are three foundations for the program: increase teacher resources, targeted professional development, and community collaboration, with the goal of improving

student health outcomes and academic achievement. The position uses a logic model. Mr. Schooley said he works with many community members on many different things.

The position's current initiatives include working with Chatham Drug Free, a triennial assessment of the district's local wellness policy, accountability, professional development, data collection, and tobacco prevention and cessation.

- Chatham Drug Free: Mr. Schooley said Chatham Drug Free does a lot of substance use education with youth. He said there is a lot of knowledge in the group.
- Triennial Assessment: The schools are required to look through all the policies to make sure they are in compliance with state policy.
- Teacher Accountability: Part of the position is making sure teachers are teaching what they are supposed to. The district has implemented administrator and teacher attestations and pre-test/post-test assessments. He said the district is going to expand this process to 4th and 5th grade and further expansions.
- Professional Development: He said that teacher workdays were focused on empowerment and self-care coming back from COVID. He said the district has also worked on self-paced teacher modules and a book club where teachers can get continuing education credits.
- Data: Mr. Schooley said the district has implemented a school connectedness survey to replace the former bullying survey. Additionally, the district participated in the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Youth Risk Behavior Survey in the past year and is waiting for the results.

Mr. Schooley said the district will be expanding accountability measures and analyze the YRBS data.

Dr. Lloyd said the second-leading cause of death among youth is suicide. She asked what initiatives the schools are doing to address this. Mr. Schooley said the district does a lot of social-emotional learning K-6, and Ms. Fowler said the district is piloting it in high school. She added that the district has a social-emotional learning assessment that teachers complete that looks at students. She said if students are showing up in areas that they need extra support, there are small groups that students can be referred to with like needs. She added there is also a risk assessment process.

Dr. Lloyd asked how the schools can help support the child. Ms. Fowler said the district partners with mental health professionals in the area that go to the schools. She said that students receive services regardless of ability to pay.

Dr. Lloyd asked what is being done to support mental health for teachers. Ms. Fowler said sick days are covered. Mr. Schooley and Ms. Fowler also mentioned the district's Employee Assistance Program which provides counseling.

Mr. Zelek said while schools play an important role, it takes a community collective and strategy to address these issues. That included, he said, a resilience training for staff at the schools and other organizations.

Commissioner Gomez Flores said he wanted to see more partnership with Parks and Rec. Mr. Schooley said there is already some overlap with Parks and Rec. Ms. Fowler said that most of those partnerships go through Mr. Chris Blice with CCS and those exist.

HEALTH DIRECTOR REPORT

Mr. Zelek offered the following comments:

- Brenda Clegg is the new Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Officer, and also brings a lot of HR expertise.
- Elizabeth Plata, the Policy and QI Officer, has accepted a position with county HR and will be leaving her role. The position has been posted.
- The department is also recruiting for two Environmental Health specialist positions and a preparedness coordinator/infection control position under the clinic.
- Presentations around the 2021 Chatham County Community Assessment have begun. Presentations have been given to multiple groups and some articles have been in the paper utilizing that data. Paper copies will be coming to the board soon.
- Terri Buchanan, Processing Assistant with HPP, is now the department's representative on the board of the Chatham County Partnership for Children.
- The department is continuing to work on finalizing contracts with the pre-paid health plans. Draft contracts have been received from all PHPs.
- Mr. Zelek said he has spoken with NCDHHS related to materials related to the Dobbs decision. According to NCDHHS, materials will be coming. He said he does not have control over their timeline.
- The department continues to monitor the situation around monkeypox. There are around 250 cases in NC right now with most of them in men who have sex with men but that can change. The CCPHD is not getting vaccine directly but has enrolled as a provider so they can get vaccines as needed. PHS has some clients, and the CCPHD has begun reaching out to those clients.
- Zach Deaton, CCHS Director, reported that the clinic has ordered bivalent boosters for COVID. He said Laura Parks, Immunization Nurse, completed the order today. Mr. Zelek said the department is also ordering Novavax.
- Chatham County has returned to the yellow/medium level of COVID transmission. The county was at a high level for a long time. The virus is still out there. Mr. Zelek said there has been some funding related to COVID and thinking about how to leverage that. One resource is a vaccine storage, inventory, and management system.

OLD BUSINESS

None.

NEW BUSINESS

Appoint BOH Standing Committees

Dr. Barbee referred to the list of standing committees for the Board of Health.

Dr. Pappas motioned to approve the list of standing committees for the new fiscal year, and Dr. Lloyd seconded. The motion was approved unanimously.

Health Director Position Description Review

Some minor changes were made to the position description for the Health Director that Mr. Zelek noted to the group.

Ms. Reitz-Barlow motioned to approve the updated description, Dr. Freese seconded. The motion was approved unanimously.

ADJOURNMENT

Ms. Reitz-Barlow motioned to adjourn the meeting, Dr. Herman-Giddens seconded. The motion was approved unanimously.



Karen Barbee, EdD, Chair



Secretary Ex Officio

Michael Zelek, MPH, Public Health Director